Investigator Garrison investigated

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Mr. Jim Garrison's investigation into an alleged conspiracy to assassinate President Kennedy has had many of the elements of a television spectacular; and it became one last night.

The National Broadcasting Company televised a one-hour special report, and also changed roles. It investigated the investigation of the New Orleans district attorney, and produced a man who said that he was the missing witness, Mr. Clay (Clem) Bertrand.

Mr. Frank McGee, the narrator, said: "For his own protection we will not disclose the real name of the man known as Clem Bertrand. His real name has been given to the Department of Justice. He is not Clay Shaw."

Mr. Garrison hardly has a case if this is proved to be correct. Mr. Clay Shaw, a New Orleans businessman, has been charged with conspiring to kill the late President. According to the New Orleans attorney general, he and Bertrand are the same man.

N.B.C. also interviewed a prosecution witness, Mr. Fred Leemans. He said that Mr. Garrison's investigators offered to help him raise $2,500 (£892) to start a nightclub if he could remember that Mr. Shaw used the name Clay Bertrand and was accompanied at his Turkish bath by someone named Lee.

He is the fourth prosecution witness to claim that he had been offered a concession in exchange for assistance in the investigation.

Mr. Jim Garrison.

Mr. Garrison said that N.B.C. had the calculated objective of destroying his case, and lodged a complaint with the Federal Communications Commission.

He also said: "All the screaming and hollering now being heard is evidence that we have caught a very large fish. It is obvious that there are elements in Washington, D.C., which are desperate because we are in the process of uncovering their hoax."

This is a very serious charge, as indeed is the suggestion that an attorney general and his staff acted as Mr. Leemans claimed that they did. The first amounts to a conspiracy of the Federal Government to protect assassins, and the second to being party to perjury.

The enormity of these suggestions explains in part the refusal of federal law enforcement agencies and responsible newspapers to take Mr. Garrison seriously. But there are reasons.

The American Establishment cannot bring itself to believe that there was a conspiracy. This natural abhorrence of the ugly does not make ugliness impossible, of course, but Mr. Garrison is not the man to convince it.

Everything in Louisiana seems different, even the legal system is based on the Napoleonic Code. Every politician is larger than life, and incomprehensible to northerners, and Mr. Jim Garrison, physically immense, rarely without a pistol strapped to his waist, is larger and more incomprehensible than most.

Much of this helps to explain the conduct of his investigation, the press conference, the casual use of hypnosis and sodium pentothal to improve the memory of a drug addict, and the wild claims that lawyers trained in the Anglo-American tradition would dismiss as hearsay or worse.

Mr. Garrison has subpoenaed Mr. Richard Helms, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency. The suggestion is that the agency was connected with a group to which Lee Harvey Oswald once belonged.

It appears that all that Mr. Garrison has succeeded in doing so far is to raise the suspicion that the Central Intelligence Agency is trying to keep secret information that may, or may not, have some peripheral bearing on the past of Lee Harvey Oswald.